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SOME OBSERVATIONS MADE ON THE MADEIRAN SPECTACLED WARBLER IN FEBRUARY 1961

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The Madeiran Spectacled Warbler (*Sylvia conspicillata bella*) is certainly a very local resident of Madeira, and these notes refer only to a small colony inhabiting the slopes to the left of the road immediately after passing through the tunnel on the way to Caniçal. Here, about 1.000 feet above sea level with fine views over the small scattered houses of Caniçal to the barren rocky promontory of Ponta de São Lourenço beyond, one can walk along a narrow pathway which follows the *levada* with on each side, steep slopes of rough grass, jumbled rocks and patches of brambles. These slopes face the full sun and the winds coming from the Atlantic, which at times blow at gale force, yet here are to be found the fragile looking little Spectacled Warblers, either skulking in the tangles of brambles searching diligently for insects, or flitting lightly over the rocks and grass to another patch of cover.

The first time I visited these slopes, I only had $1\frac{1}{2}$ hour at my disposal and on this occasion saw only one male, who obligingly took up his stance on a bare bramble branch which projected above the rest and proceeded to pour forth his song. It was while I was watching him that I noticed a movement in a clump of brambles closer at hand, and adjusting my field glasses, I saw a small bird of the warbler family searching the leaves for insects. This was about the size of a Blackcap but seemed

1) Sissinghurst Court, Cranbrook, Kent, England.

of a somewhat stouter build, entirely dark brown with a reddish brown cap, which was raised at frequent intervals as the bird moved. So far this warbler has not been identified.

About 3 weeks later I again visited this part of the island accompanied by Mr. Maul, the Director of the Municipal Museum, hoping to see this bird again and also to try and determine the approximate number of Spectacled Warblers in a given area. We concentrated on the slopes and on a small valley between the mouth of the tunnel and where the *levada* and path cling to the side of the bare precipitous rocks. We arrived at about 10.30 a.m. on a hot, still day, and it was some time before we heard any sounds from the warblers, although a pair of Kestrels were skrilly kee-kee-ing and chittering from the rocks, and we could hear the songs of wild canaries coming from the distant woods of mimosa and pine near the crest of the hills above the tunnel. We also heard several notes which we could not identify, and then came the churring warning of a Spectacled Warbler, the bird presently flying to our right. This warning note was heard on several occasions not only at our approach, but also when some dogs appeared. We were in this small area for just over 2 hours and during this time we saw perhaps 4 or 5 individual birds, the cocks giving us plenty of time to admire their soft, delicate colours as they sang invariably from the topmost branch of the bramble clumps. We also watched the display flight of a cock, as he flirted his wings and sang high above our heads, to suddenly dive perpendicularly into a tangle of brambles growing down the slope below us, and as we walked back towards the car we had a final view of a pair of these charming birds as they hunted together through the bushes for insects.